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# Status of migratory *Cuculus* cuckoos in Zaïre

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Basing ourselves on the collections in the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren (KMMA), the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences, Brussels (KBIN) and the British Museum (Natural History), Tring (BMNH), we have found that some points regarding the status of migratory *Cuculus* cuckoos in Zaïre need clarification.

*Cuculus canorus*

According to Seel (1984), the Cuckoo evacuates the northern hemisphere virtually completely in December-January. This would imply that the northwestern African-Iberian race *bangsi* crosses the Equator (and reaches Zaïre); this population is small, both in size and in number. Vaurie (1965) gave as range in wing chord measurements for *bangsi* males 203–217 mm against 218–233 mm in nominate *canorus*, and we find on average females in all races smaller than males.

TABLE 1
Number of specimens of *Cuculus canorus* from Rwanda, Burundi and Zaïre in KMMA

| Month | 1st Winter | Adult |
|---|---|---|
| August | 0 | 1 |
| September | 6* | 4 |
| October | 11* | 6* |
| November | 7 | 0*** |
| December | 2** | 0 |
| January | 0 | 4 |
| February | 6 | 8* |
| March | 12* | 22* |
| April | 5 | 2 |
| May | 1 | 0 |

* almost exclusively in the eastern part of the region
** in the south of Zaïre
*** 1 in KBIN

The hypothesis of evacuation of the northern hemisphere is not contradicted by the monthly pattern of specimens in KMMA (Schouteden 1950, augmented by several then considered as *C. gularis*; Table 1). Adult birds proceed southwards before first-winter birds, but all Cuckoos apparently pass Zaïre. However, we must investigate the possibility that some Cuckoos, most likely (the whole population of) *bangsi*, remain to winter in western Africa. Field observations may not all be reliable, because of possible confusion with the very similar *C. gularis*. Checklists published after Seel's revision for Ivory Coast (Thiollay 1985), Ghana (Grimes 1987) and Mount Nimba (Colston & Curry-Lindahl 1986; the BMNH holds the six specimens, mostly moulting first-year birds from December-January, with wing chords 193–206 mm) suggest wintering there, which was already accepted by Moreau (1972). Farther to the east, in Nigeria (Elgood 1982), Cameroon (Louette 1981), Gabon (Brosset & Erard 1986) and Central African Republic (Carroll 1988), the Cuckoo is very rare or unrecorded. One bird in BMNH is small and referable to *bangsi*—a first-year female, 29 October 1910, Bitye, Cameroon; wing 185 mm—but there is also a midwinter ringing recovery from Cameroon of a British bird (definitely not *bangsi*). Only one bird in Zaïre, the hepatic KMMA specimen taken at Bobito (Ubangi) on 15 January 1959 (and present there already for some days according to the collector), is remarkable in its presence that far north in midwinter, no other Cuckoo ever having been taken in this region, where Herroelen, Maes and others made quite substantial observations (but there are two autumn birds from Boende and Yalokele, not far to the south), suggesting either very rapid overflying of this general area or another route.

According to Moreau (1972), the autumn passage is over a broad front in Africa but the spring passage is especially remarkable in the east. Verheyen (1951), however, suggested that the birds enter western Europe

in spring from the southwest. Seel's (1984) findings are not in conflict with either of these assumptions. Large birds (which cannot be *bangsi*) indeed pass through North Africa and Iberia in late spring (specimens in BMNH: 10 females, wing chord 190–207 mm, mean 200.6 mm; two males, over 220 mm).

Herroelen (1983) suggested that the birds taken in eastern Zaïre were not *bangsi* but possibly *subtelephonus*, a race supposedly present in eastern Africa as well (Meinertzhagen 1937, Britton 1980). The determination of an individual to subspecies is tricky, some rather small birds having been caught as far north as Belgium (Herroelen measured an adult female with wing chord only 193 mm) and the supposed differences given by Vaurie (1965), Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1970) and Cramp (1985) are hardly useful. Pending further evidence therefore, we do not yet admit *bangsi* to the list of Zaïre contrary to what could be inferred from Seel (1984) and Cramp (1985).

Incidentally, Payne (1977a) demonstrated that the immature of this species is browner in general colour—and has brown or rufous in the primaries and wing coverts—than the immature of *C. gularis*, which is greyish, always without brown (in Fry *et al.* 1988, hereafter called *Birds of Africa*, a brownish juvenile is illustrated as *C. gularis*!).

*Cuculus poliocephalus/rochii*

The Lesser Cuckoo *C. poliocephalus*, a migrant to eastern Africa from Asia, is as yet unknown from Zaïre: if it occurred, it could be distinguished from the Madagascar Cuckoo *C. rochii* by its hepatic females and smaller size (maximum wing chord 162 mm; mean of 10 males from India in BMNH 154.5 mm), and by its presence in Africa later in the year, the first recorded date being 26 November, in Tanzania (Becking 1988).

There are in fact more Madagascar Cuckoos from Zaïre than were known to Becking: the KMMA holds 9 specimens, dated June (2), July (3), August (1), September (2), October (1); 5 from Kivu, 4 from Kasai. In the KBIN, there are two. One is the type of *Cuculus stormsi* Dubois 1887 (with a nice illustration), from "Tanganyka", undated, with wing chord measurements of 165 and 168 mm; this name a junior synonym of *rochii*. The other one, from Shinkulu, Upemba (Verheyen 1953), collected on 26 November 1947, is an adult male with wing chord 162.5 mm, but measured on a worn feather (when fresh, it might well have been 3 mm longer). This is very late in the season. In Madagascar, Rand (1936) had a specimen "ready to lay" in mid-August and Milon (1959) found the species present from September onwards, and "en plein chant" October to December. Milon studied breeding and proved it to occur from November to April. The period of occurrence in Zaïre is therefore extended and overlaps with the early arrivals in Madagascar. The states of moult of the adult *rochii* specimens from Zaïre are as follows: 2 with active moult (July), 5 with interrupted moult in wings and tail (June to August) and 3 with no moult (September to November), a pattern in accordance with their migration.

Some birds from Zaïre are rusty on the neck (*contra* Becking). This may correspond to the female as given for the Lesser Cuckoo in *Birds of Africa*, but Langrand (1990) says "sexes similar" for the Madagascar

Cuckoo, and a bird with brown feathers on the neck is depicted therein as "immature", confirmed by the description. There is one immature in the KMMA collection (119766 from Idjwi Island in Lake Kivu, August): all juvenile feathers are with narrow white fringes as in *C. solitarius* or *poliocephalus*; very few tawny fringes are present on head, neck and mantle.

*Cuculus clamosus*

The Black Cuckoo is variable in plumage in Zaïre. Both the red-breasted race *gabonensis* and the almost black nominate race are present. Chapin (1939) postulated that the forest phenotype is surrounded by a savanna phenotype with interbreeding along all zones of contacts yielding intermediates ('*jacksoni*', '*mabirae*') which are nothing more than *gabonensis*/*clamosus* hybrids. There are a few birds of the *c. clamosus* phenotype (which can be barred to some extent; it is not necessarily completely black) in the collection from northern Zaïre, dated January (2), April, June, July (2), September (2) and November. Such birds, in breeding condition, are also known from west of Zaïre: there are two from Nigeria (November) and one female from Powo, Cameroon, September (BMNH material). Therefore, the supposed migration of southern *c. clamosus* towards Nigeria and further west (Curry-Lindahl 1981), if it exists at all, does not seem to involve birds in northern Zaïre. What happens in the west? The BMNH has blackish birds from West Africa from the months January (1), March (1), April (1), May (3), June (2), July (2), September (1). Completely black birds, on the other hand, have been found in southern Zaïre only in the months October (1), February (4), March (1, plus 3 fledglings), April (2), May (1 fledgling). This group may contain some migrants from further south. The species breeds in South Africa from September to April; but very young birds from Zaïre were collected in the months March (5), May (3), July (2), August (2), October (1), exactly the opposite season. A juvenile from Kwango (October) could belong to either race.

Among the 75 males, 23 females and 15 unsexed in KMMA, there are only the following in active moult: northern area of Zaïre (number: moult scores, following Ashmole 1962): September (2:7 and 49), October (1:46, adjacent Cameroon), November (1:7), January (2:4 and 44); southern area: February (1:8), March (1:8), April (2:4 and 11). Moult timing is thus different for the birds collected in these two areas, suggesting that different populations are involved.

*C. c. gabonensis* is very close in plumage to the Red-chested Cuckoo *C. solitarius*, but in view of the very different juvenile plumage it seems unlikely that the two species are close relatives, as claimed in *Birds of Africa*. The statement that *C. clamosus* has a "rather slender build" is misleading; *clamosus* is in fact a heavier bird than *solitarius* for about the same wing length (weights given in *Birds of Africa* itself; Herroelen weighed live *clamosus*: 75, 93 and 94 g; Verheyen (1953) gives 66 and 74–81 g for 8 male *solitarius*. As a specimen, the Black Cuckoo looks more thick-set. The juvenile plumage of *solitarius* is very different, and close to that of the other African breeding *Cuculus* (*gularis*) and some of the oriental species. Probably the divergent juvenile plumage of *clamosus* has a mimetic function (cf. Payne 1977b).

The "immature" Black Cuckoo *C. c. gabonensis* illustrated in *Birds of Africa*, with whitish tips to the rectrices, reddish breast and barred belly, is in fact an adult bird. The young of this species is jet-black in all races, the tail being uniformly black (as mentioned correctly by Chapin (1939), Friedmann (1948) and Snow (1978), and illustrated for *C. c. clamosus*. Its first moult yields the adult pattern, including the coloured and barred parts on the ventral side and the white-tipped rectrices. A typical adult of *gabonensis* is much more reddish on the breast than the other specimen illustrated in *Birds of Africa*. In *gabonensis* the examples with unbarred red breast are usually considered to be the males, whereas those with blackish and pale barring in the reddish breast are considered to be the females; but BMNH specimens sexed by Serle from Nigeria show that males can have a banded breast.

It seems that in the adult female *solitarius* the reddish brown on the breast is paler than in the male, in fact the opposite tendency to that in *poliocephalus, rochii*, and indeed *canorus*, in which the female is more brownish than the male.

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# Notes on birds observed in beech (*Fagus*) forests in the Maoershan Natural Reserve, Guangxi Autonomous Region, China

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As part of long term research on the evolution of bird faunas in forests of southern beeches (*Nothofagus*) (Vuilleumier 1985, Vuilleumier & Kikkawa 1991), I also visited wet temperate forests in the northern hemisphere, including northern beeches (*Fagus*), for comparative purposes. Thus, between 9 and 11 June 1992 I studied the avifauna living in and around beech (*Fagus*) forests in the Maoershan Natural Reserve Area, Xing'an and Ziyuan Counties, Guangxi Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China. Even though my visit was brief, and unfavourable circumstances (including prolonged travel on very bad roads, and acute respiratory illness) prevented me from spending as much time in the forests as I had originally planned, my notes might be of interest because the avifauna of this forested area of southern China is poorly known and may not have been visited by western ornithologists in the recent past, if at all. The only published reports on the Maoershan Natural Reserve that I am aware of are those of Li (1985, 1986) (which I saw) and Zhang (1979) (which I did not see). I did not find reports dealing with the avifauna of Maoershan or its forests.